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HD **Trudeau government blames post-pandemic recovery as Canada's greenhouse emissions rise for a second straight year**

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OTTAWA-Canada's annual greenhouse gas emissions increased for the second year in a row in 2022, a bump the federal government blames in part on how economic activity was still bouncing back from the closures of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the latest official government tally of national emissions that cause climate change, Canada's overall greenhouse gas output in 2022 was 708 megatonnes of pollution.

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That's 1.3 per cent higher than the 698 megatonnes in 2021, and 2.6 per cent higher than the emissions reported in 2020.

Speaking to reporters just as the government released the figures, federal Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault said the increase is partly because of a "rebound" from the pandemic, when businesses shut down and commuter traffic plummeted because of public health measures. Guilbeault also said part of the increase comes from improved measurements of highly potent methane emissions, which were previously undercounted, in an oil and gas sector that remains responsible for the largest share of national greenhouse gas pollution.

Overall, however, Guilbeault stressed that the 2022 emissions are still below levels posted before the pandemic, which the report credited to the movement toward cleaner fuels, the "modernization" of industrial processes, and more.

Guilbeault also claimed Canada is "on track" to achieve its emissions reduction targets for 2026 and 2030, when the country has pledged in global negotiations to post greenhouse gas emissions that are at least 40 per cent lower than they were in 2005.

The government's most recent projections predict Canada's emissions will be at least 36 per cent lower in 2030 than in 2005, leaving a gap of at least 28 millions tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

Thursday's report calculated the country's total emissions in 2022 were 7.1 per cent lower than in 2005.

"We knew emissions were going to bounce back in 2022 as our economy burst back to life," Guilbeault said.

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"We need everyone to help drive down the emissions that are already fuelling costly climate impacts like wildfires that damaged so much in Canada last year, and threaten to do so again this year. That's why we cannot pause or start throwing environmental measures overboard in the pursuit of short-term partisan gain."

Environmental groups had mixed responses to the report. A statement from the David Suzuki Foundation called for stronger efforts to fight climate change, noting that the latest tally showed oil and gas emissions increased and remain Canada's largest source of planet-warming pollution. Meanwhile, the British Columbia-based think tank, Clean Energy Canada, said the report shows the country is "moving in the right direction" and that the 2030 target is "in reach."

Under the Liberal government, Ottawa has implemented a suite of policies designed to slash Canada's greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to the global effort to contain the damage of the climate crisis. Most contentiously, the policies include a legal requirement for all provinces to have a minimum carbon price that discourages emissions and rewards moves to reduce them. The price level goes up every year, and is currently set at $80 per tonne of emissions, which adds about 17 cents to the cost of a litre of consumer gasoline, according to federal stats.

Provinces that don't implement their own pricing systems are forced to adopt the federal scheme, which includes a consumer levy on fuels as well as rebates that get paid out to households every three months to cover extra costs from the system. In Ontario, where this system applies, a family of four will get $1,120 over the coming year.

Under Pierre Poilievre, the Conservatives have aggressively attacked the policy and have pledged to "axe the tax" on consumer fuel if they win power in the next federal election.

Alongside the carbon price, the Trudeau Liberals are also implementing a cap on emissions from the oil and gas production that will require the industry to reduce its overall greenhouse gas output by at least 35 per cent below 2019 levels by 2030 - a level that some argue is too little for Canada's heaviest-emitting sector.

Thursday's report showed the oil and gas sector remained responsible for the largest share of national emissions in 2022, at 31 per cent. The sector's emissions have also increased 21 per cent since 2005, the report said, with the biggest proportion of the industry's emissions coming from the Western oilsands.

When asked about this on Thursday, Guilbeault said draft regulations for the oil and gas cap will be released before the fall.

After requiring the phase out of coal-fired power plants, the government is also moving to restrict the amount of emitting fossil fuels used to create electricity after 2035, cement sales targets for zero-emission vehicles, and tighten regulations for cleaner fuel.

While Conservatives have railed against carbon pricing, the Liberals routinely accuse their opponents of failing to present credible alternatives to reduce emissions. A recent report from the Canadian Climate Institute said carbon pricing could be responsible for at least a third of the country's projected emissions reductions by 2030 - though the bulk of that would come from industrial pricing systems rather than the consumer levy on fuel.

Critics from the environmental movement, meanwhile, have denounced the Liberal government's use of $34 billion in public money to finance construction of the massive Trans Mountain expansion project, which tripled the carrying capacity of a decades-old oil pipeline from Alberta to the Pacific coast.

ART Steven Guilbeault, federal minister of environment and climate change, answers questions on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on May 2, 2024.

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